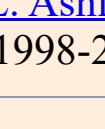


Animal Brides and Animal Bridegrooms

Tales Told by North American Indians

selected and edited by



D. L. Ashliman
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The Bear Who Married a Woman

Tsimshian

Once upon a time there lived a widow of the tribe of the Gispaxlá'ts. Many men tried to marry her daughter, but she declined them all.

The mother said, "When a man comes to marry you, feel of the palms of his hands. If they are soft, decline him. If they are rough, accept him." She meant that she wanted to have for a son-in-law a man skillful in building canoes.

Her daughter obeyed her commands and refused the wooings of all young men. One night a youth came to her bed. The palms of his hands were very rough, and therefore she accepted his suit. Early in the morning, however, he had suddenly disappeared, even before she had seen him.

When her mother arose early in the morning and went out, she found a halibut on the beach in front of the house, although it was midwinter. The following evening the young man came back, but disappeared again before the dawn of the day. In the morning the widow found a seal in front of the house. Thus they lived for some time. The young woman never saw the face of her husband; but every morning she found an animal on the beach, every day a larger one. Thus the widow came to be very rich.

She was anxious to see her son-in-law, and one day she waited until he arrived. Suddenly she saw a red bear emerge from the water. He carried a whale on each side, and put them down on the beach. As soon as he noticed that he was observed, he was transformed into a rock, which may be seen up to this day. He was a supernatural being of the sea.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 19.
- The Tsimshian Indians are native to the coastal regions of British Columbia and southern Alaska.

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The Girl Who Married the Crow

Thompson (Ntlakypamuk)

A girl belonging to a village of four underground lodges near Lytton refused all suitors who had come from Spences Bridge, Nicola, Kamloops, and Lillooet, although they brought as marriage gifts robes, *dentalia*, and other valuables. Her parents and the chief of the village were angry with her for refusing so many good suitors. Therefore she became sad, and would have committed suicide had not her brothers talked kindly with her.

One morning, when she had gone to the river to bathe and to draw water for the house, she thought, "I wish a man from far away would come and take me!"

Crow-Man, who lived at the mouth of the river, heard her. He said, "A pretty girl far away wants a husband. I wish I could go to her!"

At once a man appeared to him and said, "I will help you, if you will do as I direct you. You must shut your eyes and pray to me, and I shall grant your desire. Now begin!"

Crow-Man knelt down and prayed that he might be enabled to go to the girl. His eyes closed while he was praying. Then his helper told him to open his eyes and look at himself. He saw that he had been transformed into a crow, with wings and with black feathers all over his body. He was afraid, and remained silent.

His helper told him that he would not be a crow always, but only for the journey to the girl. He said, "Now, fly up the river! And early in the morning you will see a girl bathing near four underground lodges. She is the wife that you desire!"

It was springtime, when crows come up the river. Three mornings the girl had repeated her supplication for a husband. Early the fourth morning she went to the accustomed place, put down her bark water baskets, took off her clothes, and went to bathe. She had just made her supplication when a crow came up the river and passed close to her head.

She called him nasty names and said, "Why do you fly so close to my head, you black ugly bird? You will blind me with the dirt of your feet."

It was Crow-Man, who was acting under the instructions of his helper. He flew past out of sight, alighted on the ground, shut his eyes, and prayed. When he opened his eyes, he was a man again. He walked back to where the girl was washing herself in the water, and sat down on her clothes. Presently she saw him, and asked him to leave. She pleaded with him to go away, but he paid no heed.

When she had asked him four times, he replied, "If you will become my wife, I will release your clothes."

She assented, saying, "You must be my husband, for you have seen my naked body."

Crow-Man shut his eyes and prayed. When he opened them again, a large beaverskin robe was there, and a dugout cedar canoe. He gave the robe to his wife. They embarked in the canoe and went downstream.

As the girl did not return, the people looked for her. They found her clothes and the water baskets, and thought that she had drowned herself.

She lived in her husband's country for a while, and bore a son to him. When the boy was growing up, he wished to see his grandparents. Every day he asked for them. Finally his parents determined to take him to see them.

They went up the river in a canoe loaded with presents of many kinds, and eventually reached Lytton. They moored their canoe at the watering place. The weather was warm, and the woman's parents were living in a mat tent. Her younger sister came down to draw water and discovered them. She went back with the news; and the parents cleaned their house, and made ready to receive their son-in-law. He gave his father-in-law all the presents, and the people danced to welcome them. He made up his mind to live there and became an adopted member of the tribe.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 11 (Lancaster and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), pp. 30-32.

- This tale was collected by James A. Teit.
- The place names mentioned in this legend (Lytton, Spences Bridge, Nicola, Kamloops, and Lillooet) are all in southern British Columbia. Lytton is at the junction of the Thompson and Fraser rivers.

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The Woman Who Became a Horse

Thompson (Ntlakypamuk)

A chief had many horses, and among them a stallion which his wife often rode. The woman and stallion became enamoured of each other and cohabited. The woman grew careless of her household duties and always wanted to look after the horses.

When the people moved camp, and the horses were brought in, it was noticed that the stallion made right for the woman and sniffed about her as stallions do with mares. After this she was watched.

When her husband learned the truth, he shot the stallion. The woman cried and would not go to bed.

At daybreak she was gone, no one knew where. About a year after this it was discovered that she had gone off with some wild horses. One day when the people were traveling over a large open place they saw a band of horses, and the woman among them. She had partly changed into a horse. Her pubic hair had grown so long that it resembled a tail. She also had much hair on her body, and the hair of her head had grown to resemble a horse's mane. Her arms and legs had also changed considerably; but her face was still human, and bore some resemblance to her original self.

The chief sent some young men to chase her. All the wild horses ran away, but she could not run so fast as they, and was run down and lassoed. She was brought into her husband's lodge; and the people watched her for some time, trying to tame her, but she continued to act and whinny like a horse. At last they let her free. The following year they saw her again. She had become almost entirely horse, and had a colt by her side. She had many children afterwards.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 11 (Lancaster and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), p. 53.

- This tale was collected by James A. Teit.

- A note by Teit about his source: "The narrator said he thought there was a little more to this story, but he did not remember it. He said the story was common to both the Thompson and the Okanagon. He had first heart it himself from an Okanagon over fifty years ago; but it was probably in vogue among the Thompson before that, although he had not heard it.

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The Woman Who Became a Horse

Skidi Pawnee

There was a village, and the men decided to go on a warpath. So these men started, and they journeyed for several days toward the south. They came to a thickly wooded country. They found wild horses, and among them was a spotted pony.

One man caught the spotted pony and took care of it. He took it home, and instructed his wife to look after it, as if it were their chief. This she did, and, further, she liked the horse very much. She took it where there was good grass. In the winter time she cut young cottonwood shoots for it, so that the horse was always fat. In the night, if it was stormy, she pulled a lot of dry grass, and when she put the blanket over the horse and tied it up, she stuffed the grass under the blanket, so the horse never got cold. It was always fine and sleek.

One summer evening she went to where she had tied the horse, and she met a fine-looking man, who had on a buffalo robe with a spotted horse pictured on it. She liked him; he smelt finely.

She followed him until they came to where the horse had been, and the man said, "You went with me. It is I who was a horse."

She was glad, for she liked the horse. For several years they were together, and the woman gave birth, and it was a spotted pony. When the pony was born, the woman found she had a tail like that of a horse. She also had long hair. When the colt sucked, the woman stood up.

For several years they roamed about, and had more ponies, all spotted. At home the man mourned for his lost wife. He could not make out why should go off.

People went on a hunt many years afterwards, and they came across these spotted ponies. People did not care to attack them, for among them was a strange looking animal. But, as they came across them now and then, they decided to catch them. They were hard to catch, but at last they caught them, all but the woman, for she could run fast; but as they caught her children, she gave in and was caught.

People said, "This is the woman who was lost."

And some said, "No, it is not."

Her husband was sent for, and he recognized her. He took his bow and arrows out and shot her dead, for he did not like to see her with the horse's tail. The other spotted ponies were kept, and as they increased, they were spotted. So the people had many spotted ponies.

- Source: George A. Dorsey, *Traditions of the Skidi Pawnee = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 8 (Boston and New York: Published for the American Folk-Lore Society by Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1904), pp. 294-295.

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The Bear Woman

Okanagon

It was late fall, and people were in the mountains hunting. Six people were living together: a man and his wife, his parents, and his two sisters.

One day when out hunting, the man came on a patch of lily roots. On his return home he said to his wife, "I saw a fine patch of large lilies. Tomorrow morning we shall move there and stay for a few days, so that you can dig them."

They set up a lodge near the place. And on the following morning early, on his way to hunt, he showed his wife the place and left her there to dig.

In the afternoon a large grizzly bear appeared at the place. The woman was intent on her work and did not notice the bear until he was close to her. He said to her, "I want you to be my wife."

She agreed, for she knew he would kill her if she refused. He took her on his back and carried her to his house.

Towards evening the hunter returned carrying a load of deer meat. His wife was not there. He thought, "She is late and will come soon."

He roasted meat for both of them. He ate, and then took his bow and arrows and went in search of his wife. He saw where she had been digging roots. He called, but received no answer. It grew dark, and he returned to his camp. He could not sleep. At daybreak he went out again. He saw the tracks of the grizzly bear going away, but no tracks of his wife leaving the spot. He thought she might have gone to his parents' camp, or the bear might have killed her, but he saw neither her tracks nor signs of a struggle with the bear.

He went to the camp. His father told him that she had not arrived. He related what he had seen, and his father said, "The grizzly bear has not killed her. He has married her."

The man could neither sleep nor eat. At last the fourth night he slept, for he was very tired.

His wife appeared to him in a dream and said, "The grizzly has taken me." She told him where the bear's house was. She said, "Every morning at daybreak he takes me to dig roots at a certain place. If you are strong, you can kill him; but he is very fierce and endowed with magic power. You must fix your arrows as I direct you, and sit where I tell you. I have prepared a hiding place for you, where you may sit on a boulder. Prepare medicine to wash me with, for otherwise, when the bear dies, I shall die too through his power. If he kills you, I shall kill myself. Get young fir-tops and *konéłps* [*veratrum californicum*, durand], and soak them in water. With these you must rub me. Prepare one arrow by rubbing it with fat of snakes, and the other arrow anoint with rattlesnake poison. Sit down on the rock in the place that I have prepared; and on the fourth morning, when I bring the bear past close to the rock, shoot him in the throat."

The hunter prepared everything as directed. He made two new arrows with detachable foreshafts. He made them very carefully, and put good stone heads on them. He searched for snakes, and anointed the foreshafts of his arrows and the points. Early in the morning he was at the place indicated.

The grizzly bear's house was a cave in a cliff, and at daybreak the man saw the smoke from his fire coming out through a hole in the top of the cliff. Soon he saw his wife and the bear emerge from the entrance. Her face was painted, and she carried her root digger. She dug roots, and the bear gathered them.

The man returned home and told what he had seen to his father, who said, "I have a strong guardian spirit, and I shall protect you. Do not be afraid. Act according the directions your wife has given to you in your dream, and kill the bear."

On the fourth morning at daybreak he was sitting on the rock. His wife and the bear drew near. She was digging in circles, and the grizzly bear followed her. When she made the fourth circle, she passed quite close to the rock.

He aimed an arrow at her, and she cried, "Husbands never kill their wives!" He lowered his bow and laughed.

The bear stood up and was angry. He abused the woman, calling her bad names. Just then he was close to the rock. The hunter spoke to him, and the bear turned to look at the hunter, who shot him right in the throat. The grizzly bear tried to pull out the arrow, but could remove only the shaft. He rushed at the hunter, but could not reach him. The hunter shot his second arrow with such great force that the shaft fell off. The bear fell over and died.

Then his wife swooned, and would have died through the bear's power, had not her husband rubbed her with fir-tops and *veratrum*.

She revived and stood up. She said, "I warn you not to have connection with me. The influence of the bear is still over me. Build a lodge of fir brush for me some distance away from the people. Let your sisters feed me, and wash me with fir and *veratrum* leaves. You may speak to me from a distance. Next spring, when the snow is almost gone, I shall be your wife again."

In the spring she washed at a stream, using hot water, and her sisters-in-law rubbed her with fir boughs. The hunter also washed. Then she went into his lodge, and lived with him as before.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 11 (Lancaster and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), pp. 90-92.

- This tale was collected by James A. Teit.
- The Okanagon tribe belongs to the Salish group. Their territory included present-day British Columbia, northern Washington and Idaho, and western Montana.

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The Fish-Man

Salish

Somewhere near the mouth of the Fraser River lived a girl who had refused all suitors.

After a while a man came to visit her, and lay with her at night.

The girl said to him, "You must stay until daylight, and show yourself to my parents."

He answered, "No, I am too poor. Your people would not like me."

As he continued to come every night, the girl told her parents, and they were very angry. Then Fish-Man caused the sea to recede for many miles from the village. He let all the freshwater streams dry up, and no rain fall. The animals became thirsty, and left the country. The people could get no fish, no game, and no water to drink.

The girl told the people, "My lover has done this, because you were wroth with him and refused him."

Then the people made a long walk of planks over the mud to the edge of the sea. At the end of this they built a large platform of planks, which they covered with mats. They heaped many woolen blankets on it. Then they dressed the girl in a fine robe, combed and oiled her hair, painted her face, and put down on her head. Then they placed her on the top of the blankets and left her there. At once the sky became overcast, rain fell, the springs burst out, the streams ran, and the sea came in. The people watched until the sea rose, and floated the platform with the blankets. They saw a man climb up beside the girl

They stood up, and the girl called, "Now all is well. I shall visit you soon."

Night came on, and they saw them no more. In two days she came back, and told the people, "I live below the sea, in the fish country. The houses there are just the same as here, and the people live in the same way."

She returned again with her husband bringing presents of fish. She said, "Henceforth people here shall always be able to catch plenty of fish."

Once more she came to show them her newly born child. After that she returned to the sea, and was never seen again.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 11 (Lancaster and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), p. 131.
- This tale was collected by James A. Teit.
- A note by Teit concerning his source: "This myth ... I collected at Hope [on the Fraser River], where interior influence is rather strong. Similar versions are said to be current among the Spuzzum Indians. The narrator was an old man who could speak some Thompson.
- The Fraser River flows through British Columbia, Canada, into the Strait of Georgia at the site of present-day Vancouver.

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The Man Who Married a Bear

Nez Percé

A man name Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War (Pákatampáutx̣ṭ) lived with his father at Asotin, and in the spring of the year the youth would go away from home and lose himself till fall. He would tell no one where he had been. Now, he really was accustomed to go up the Little Salmon (Huné'he) branch of the Grande Ronde River to fish for salmon. It was the second year that he went there that this thing happened.

A bear girl lived just below the forks of Asotin Creek, and from that place she used to go over onto the Little Salmon, where Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War had a camp of boughs. One day, after fishing, he was lying in his camp not quite asleep. He heard the noise of someone walking in the woods. He heard the noise of walking go all around the camp. The grizzly-bear girl was afraid to go near the man, and soon she went away and left him. Next morning he tried to track her; and while he could see the tracks in the grass, he could not tell what it was that made them.

Next day the youth hunted deer in order to have dried meat for the winter; and that evening the grizzly-bear girl, dressed up as a human being, came into his camp. Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War had just finished his supper when he heard the footsteps, and he told him about the forest, he saw a fine girl come into the open. He wondered if this person was what he had heard the night before.

He asked the girl to tell him what she wanted, and she came and sat down beside him. The youth was bashful and could not talk to her, although she was a pretty girl. Then he said, "Where are you camping?" And she told him that three days before she had come from the forks of Asotin Creek.

"I came to see you, and to find out whether or not you would marry me."

Now, Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War did not know of anyone who lived above the mouth of Asotin Creek, and for that reason he told the girl he would take home his meat and salmon and return in ten days. So the girl went back to the forks of Asotin Creek, and the youth to the mouth of the stream with his meat. Then they returned and met; and the youth fell deeply in love with the girl, and married her.

So they lived in his camp until she said to him, "Now we will go to my home."

And when they arrived, he saw that she had a fine supply of winter food -- dried salmon, dried meat, camas, *kaus*, *sanix*, serviceberries, and huckleberries. But what most surprised him was that they went into a hole in the ground, because he knew she must be a bear.

It grew late in the fall, and they had to stay in the cave, for the girl could not go out. In the dead of winter they were still in the cave when the snow began to settle and harden. One night, near midnight, when both were asleep in their beds, the grizzly-bear girl dreamed, and roared out in her sleep.

She told her husband to build a fire and make a light. Then the grizzly-bear girl sang a song, and blood came running from her mouth. She said, "This blood you see coming from my mouth is not my blood. It is the blood of men. Down at the mouth of Asotin Creek the hunters are making ready for a bear hunt. They have observed this cave, and five hunters are coming here to see if a bear is in it." The grizzly-bear girl in her sleep knew that the hunters were making ready.

Next morning the five hunters went up to that place, and that same morning the grizzly-bear girl donned a different dress from what she usually wore, a dress that was painted red. She told her husband, "Soon after the sun leaves the earth, these hunters will be here, and then I will do my killing."

They arrived, and Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War heard them talking. He heard them say that something must be living in the cave. When the first hunter came to the door of the cave, the grizzly-bear girl rushed out and killed him. Then the four other hunters went home and told the news, and ten hunters made ready to come up and kill the bear. They camped close by for the night.

About midnight the grizzly-bear girl had another dream. She sang a song, and told her husband, "I will leave you as soon as the sun is up. This blood you see coming out of my mouth is my own blood. The hunters are close by, and will soon be here."

Soon the youth could hear the hunters talking. Then they took a pole and hung an empty garment near the mouth of the cave, and the bear rushed out at this decoy. When she turned to go back, they fired, and killed her.

The youth in the cave heard the hunters say, "Watch out! There must be another one in the cave."

So he decided he would go out; and when he came into the light, the hunters recognized him. He went home with them and told the story.

This was the year before the French trappers came, and Five-Times-Surrounded-in-War went away with them. In a year he returned, and after that he disappeared.

- Source: Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes = Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, vol. 11 (Lancaster and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), pp. 198-200.

- This tale was collected by Herbert J. Spinden.
- According to Spinden, "this is supposed to be a true tale of recent times, and not a myth."

- Asotin Creek is in southeastern Washington. It flows into the Snake River near Lewiston, Idaho. The Grande Ronde River is mostly in northeastern Oregon and also flows into the Snake River.

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Of the Woman Who Loved a Serpent Who Lived in a Lake

Passamaquoddy

Of old times. There was a very beautiful woman. She turned the heads of all the men. She married, and her husband died very soon after, but she immediately took another. Within a single year she had five husbands, and these were the cleverest and handsomest and bravest in the tribe. And then she married again.

This, the sixth, was such a silent man that he passed for a fool. But he was wiser than people thought. He came to believe, by thinking it over, that this woman had some strange secret. He resolved to find it out. So he watched her all the time. He kept his eye on her by night and by day.

It was summer, and she proposed to go into the woods to pick berries, and to camp there. By and by, when they were in the forest, she suggested that he should go on to the spot where they intended to remain and build a wigwam. He said that he would do so. But he went a little way into the woods and watched her.

As soon as she believed that he was gone, she rose and walked rapidly onwards. He followed her, unseen. She went on, till, in a deep, wild place among the rocks, she came to a pond. She sat down and sang a song. A great foam, or froth, rose to the surface of the water. Then in the foam appeared the tail of a serpent. The creature was of immense size.

The woman, who had laid aside all her garments, embraced the serpent, which twined around her, enveloping all her limbs and body in his folds. The husband watched it all. He now understood that, the venom of the serpent having entered her blood, she had saved her life by transferring it to others, who died.

He went on to the camping ground and built a wigwam. He made up two beds. He built a fire. His wife came. She was earnest that there should be only a single bed. He sternly bade her lie by herself. She was afraid of him.

She laid down and went to sleep. He arose three times during the night to replenish the fire. Every time he called her, and there was no answer. In the morning he shook her. She was dead. She had died by the poison of the serpent.

They sunk her in the pond where the snake lived.

- Source: Charles G. Leland, *The Algonquin Legends of New England; or, Myths and Folk Lore of the Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Tribes* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1884), pp. 273-274.
- The Passamaquoddy Indians formerly occupied an area between present-day Maine and New Brunswick. Today they live primarily in Maine.

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